News release

Met Office helps to beat winter ills

16 November 2006

People suffering with respiratory illness are set to benefit this winter from a pilot scheme being introduced by the Met Office, designed to improve patient well-being.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a debilitating condition that causes suffering for thousands in the UK. Symptoms include breathlessness and coughing and, for people with more-severe COPD, normal activities can become difficult. Sometimes, especially in the winter, many people with COPD find that their symptoms become worse.

This link between cold weather and COPD forms the basis of the innovative service, developed by the Met Office and funded by Cornwall Adult Social Care, which will provide up to 1,000 patients registered at 10 practices across Cornwall with automatic telephone monitoring. This service builds on last year's COPD project, which saw the Met Office work with eight Strategic Health Authorities around the UK.

In the Cornish initiative, at times when the forecast indicates that patients' risk of illness is elevated, the person will be automatically dialled and provided with an explanation of the expected weather conditions. They will also be asked to respond to questions about their condition. These responses are then to be made available to their practice nurse or doctor for follow up as required.

The Met Office has worked with Medixine, a Finnish company, to develop the interactive 'telemedicine' service which will go live on Friday 17 November 2006

Commenting on the service, Dr Tish Laing-Morton, clinical director at the Met Office, said: "These forecasts help medical staff know when patients suffering from a specific condition are most at risk of experiencing a worsening of their symptoms. Reaching these patients before they become ill is important for their well-being and the prevention of a further worsening of their condition. In taking this approach we can help reduce the risk of admissions to hospital, providing wider benefits to the Health Service."

As well as this service launching at the onset of winter, 15 November 2006 was World COPD Day - an annual event that promotes improved awareness and care of COPD around the world.

More details on how the Met Office works with the NHS

More details on forecasting for COPD

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